

More Americans suffer from depression than heart disease, cancer, and AIDS combined. An estimated one in four adults lives with a diagnosable, treatable mental health condition, and as May is Mental Health Awareness Month, it is my hope that we as a nation can embrace this issue as a crucial component to ensuring the strength and stability of our nation.

When sudden and devastating acts of violence like the Columbine, Virginia Tech, or Tucson shootings take the national stage, Americans acknowledge the necessity of raising mental health awareness and ensuring that each individual has access to the mental health services they need. What we are less apt to realize is that mental health issues plague the lives of our population in more subtle and everyday tones. As our nation faces an unimaginably stressful economic climate and an unemployment rate of nine percent, the perpetual strain on the mental well-being of otherwise well-adjusted citizens takes a costly toll. Calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline increased by 72 percent between 2007 and 2010, and Americans identify money (76 percent), work (70 percent), and the economy (65 percent) as the greatest sources of stress in their lives. As we struggle to emerge from an economic recession that has left so many Americans out of work, evicted from their homes, and disheartened in spirit, Mental Health Awareness month is more important than ever.

In May 2008, the American Journal of Psychiatry put the cost of mental illness at \$193.2 billion in lost earnings per year. At once adding to and escalating the losses brought on by the recession, it is no wonder that families are facing unparalleled levels of stress. This stress not only affects adults who face unemployment and economic uncertainty, but also our nation's children, whose lifetime perspectives are being shaped by this alarming atmosphere. In fact, four in ten unemployed parents report that they have seen behavioral changes in their children due to their unemployment, and one in five U.S. children and adolescents have some form of mental health issue. When left unaddressed, these issues can have long-lasting and self-perpetuating consequences that contribute to some of society's greatest obstacles, including academic underachievement, incarceration, obesity, domestic violence, and homelessness.

I am a firm believer that life's challenges and adversity are opportunities for growth of character, and Mental Health Awareness month is a celebration of those individuals and organizations that encourage healthy and positive ways to accomplish this. I am currently working on legislation that aims to promote mental health awareness, but I urge my constituents to take the lead in their own communities by learning about the everyday activities that can lead to greater well-being, higher productivity, and a more secure society. The costs of allowing mental health issues to go unaddressed in our society are too high, and every American deserves the acceptance and support they need to achieve their full potential in life.

For more information on mental health, please visit: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov> .